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Speaking Notes for
The Honourable Anne McLellan

Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada

Alberta Crime Prevention Symposium

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As-delivered

It is a great pleasure to be here today. Let me say that I just came from a wonderful event, and I wish you all could have been there with me and David Hancock. It was up at the Abbotsfield Recreation Centre where we were announcing the funding for 27 new community-based crime prevention projects all over the province of Alberta and in fact, some of you here may be involved in some of those projects.

I want to say a little bit more about a couple of those projects that are working in the area of Dickinsfield and the whole Beverly Towne area. It was just amazing this morning to hear local community members talk about their community-based crime prevention strategies and how they have been able to come together as communities to achieve some remarkable results. David Hancock and I were both there — I met David Hancock yesterday morning — and one thing that David and I both agree on 100% is how important community-based crime prevention is to all of us and to our families and to our communities. So it is a great pleasure for me to be here today and see so many friends who have given back in one way or another — either with me or with the National Crime Prevention Strategy — to make their communities safer and better places for them and their families.

I know that this conference — which is the first ever to bring together so many of you who have worked so hard in your local communities — is a tribute to the organizers and everybody who has been involved. So I want to thank them very much and everybody who has helped make this three-day conference a reality — I think it is terrific that you are holding this conference at the beginning of Alberta's Crime Prevention Week, when we all have the opportunity to take a little time to focus on how each one of us can take ownership and responsibility for identifying root causes of crime and preventing them before they become major problems for our local community.

I think everybody in this room probably knows that while crime rates have fallen over the last eight years, Canadians still have the sense that crime is a problem of stubborn dimensions. From my perspective, what this means is that we must do more to deal with the root causes of crime. It is a view — as your participation here attests — that is widely held. And today, I would like to take the opportunity to discuss the Government of Canada's ongoing commitment to preventing crime before it starts.

When I launched the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention in June of 1998, I knew that its success would hinge upon the strength of the partnerships upon which it was built and these partnerships would only be as strong as the determination of Canadians, people

like you in this room, to help fashion safer communities. I must say, it came as no surprise to me that Alberta was one of the first provinces to sign an agreement with the Government of Canada to join in this collaborative effort to prevent crime and reduce victimization. Since then, Albertans have demonstrated over and over again a commitment to taking action and tackling the difficult issues, but they have shown the greatest of faith in their community and have offered testimony to the capacity of these communities and the spirit and the emanating force of innovation, commitment and, ultimately, solutions. It is that commitment that drives the National Strategy on Crime Prevention.

Now, let me give you in this regard just one example of this innovation and commitment. I heard about it this morning at the Abbotsfield Recreation Centre and it was from a woman called Michelle Fillion who works in the Dickinsfield area. She talked about the four years' worth of efforts that they have put in as a community identifying resources, identifying the problems and identifying the strategies to deal with those problems. It was an amazing story of hard work, little steps but at the end of the day — and it is not the end of the day it is at the beginning — but four years later, how that community has come together, how that community has put in place programs and strategies. And the most amazing thing she said was that in that four-year period, looking back today, crime had been reduced by 40%.

As the police officers — Alex and others who are here — know, Dickinsfield has been and to some extent still is a community that has some problems to deal with. They are not there yet, but what they have accomplished through that community spirit of innovation, working together! I mean, Alex, I don't know what you think about that, but a 40% reduction of crime in that area is amazing and they did it together — families, a lot of single-parent families, a lot of kids who didn't have anywhere to go and therefore ended up roaming the streets late at night and getting into trouble, some drug problems, some alcohol problems, some domestic violence problems.

Dickinsfield is an area that has a tremendously high number of subsidized family units, apartments, etc., and up until four years ago, not a lot of places for kids especially to go or single parents to turn for help, for guidance. They have turned that around and I'm not here to say that they have solved all the problems and Michelle wouldn't say that, either, but it is an amazing story of success to date. You know, she said the thing is that they kept people together for four years and it takes an awful lot of energy — you are awfully afraid of burn-out and you need someone to help coordinate all those resources and those people. That is where the National Crime Prevention Strategy came in, because we were able to provide some dollars, to provide some help in terms of a coordinator and workers to draw upon all that great community spirit and energy — but to make sure that they didn't burn out and that they had a little bit of help to do what they knew was right for that community.

So for me, that was an amazing success story that we heard this morning — and it is only one of hundreds of amazing success stories in this province and across this country in relation to how communities and the people who live in them are taking ownership and responsibility along with the police, along with the schools, along with the businesses in the community, taking ownership and responsibility for their safety and the safety and security of their families.

As I have just mentioned, the National Strategy right now is assisting over 800 community-based projects across Canada and we believe, just as I have outlined, in making a difference in the lives of Canadians everywhere, offering support and hope to those most vulnerable to crime and victimization — and those people are children and youth, women and Aboriginal people.

Here in Alberta, I have had the pleasure of helping launch projects of various sizes and scopes. In fact, the National Strategy so far has supported almost 80 projects here in the province — in Edmonton, Calgary and places like High Prairie, Slave Lake, Red Deer and Okotoks. They range from efforts that address fetal alcohol syndrome to school and domestic violence and, as I mentioned earlier, I did have the opportunity this morning along with David Hancock at the Abbotsfield Recreation Centre to announce that the Government of Canada is providing support for 27 new projects with funding of over $800,000. The projects sponsored by the Beverly Towne

Community Development Society — which was the other project we heard about this morning from Gary Butler, who is a member of the Beverly Towne Development Society — I think help illustrate again what we are trying to do with the National Strategy.

Agencies, schools, community groups and residents will collaborate in offering choices to youth so they can better resist the influence of gangs. The possibility of reducing gang-related crime in the community lies in deflecting gang influence on young people and you know, again what we heard this morning was an amazing thing, how in Beverly Towne, through the Beverly Towne Economic Development Association, they come together to identify the problem: too many young people without guidance, without support, with nothing to do in the local community. Is anybody surprised that they might be influenced by or attracted to youth gangs? I don't think so. In fact it makes sense, tragically, and what this community has done is decide that they are going to make that challenge the focus of their whole crime prevention initiative. We are glad to be able to provide, along with the province, some support to them to do that which they identified as a local community as being of key importance to them.

I met some of those young people this morning, I met the principals from the schools in the area and when you talk to these people, there is a sense of hope and potential and enthusiasm and energy that hasn't been seen in that community for a very long time. I see Alex sitting down in the front here — the one thing that everybody said was that, apart from the community coming together, what is the key component was the community policing program — local policemen and women who are not viewed as the enemy by those young people, but policemen who are integrated into the community, working with everybody, whether it is in the school or the street. You should have heard some of the stories this morning about the impact the local community police had made. So many young people now in those communities don't see the police as someone who comes to take them away but they see the police as someone they go to for help, for support if their mother is being abused, if they are being abused, if there is an alcohol or drug problem.

They see the policeman as a friend, as someone who is there to help them, not their enemy. That is an amazing transformation in the lives of some of those young people and those families and it is a credit to everybody in communities like these and these are only two examples. I have used them because representatives were there this morning talking first hand about what they have achieved, but you achieve it by bringing everybody together and making sure everybody is pulling in the same direction. You have identified the problem and you are now working on the strategies to solve the problem — we all have a piece of the solution and we all have the responsibility to do our share to make our communities safer places.

And you know, crime prevention is not only good common sense. If you want to look at it in terms of economics, it also makes good economic sense. It costs over $10 billion a year in this whole country at all levels to maintain the criminal justice system. $10 billion and the criminal justice system is reactive. The criminal justice system kicks in after there has been another victim, after someone has been hurt or property has been destroyed or stolen and you call the police. They investigate, charges are laid, crown prosecutor, judge and perhaps jail, whatever. It is reactive to an event in which someone has been hurt or has lost something.

Let's think about it — and that is what you are doing here, thinking about the front end of this system and diverting some of those resources into proactively preventing crime and preventing victimization in our community and in this country. Wouldn't be nice if we spent some of those dollars, even a few of those $10 billion on the front end of the system as opposed to dealing with and reacting to a hurtful event after it has happened. I will say, I will say it here quite openly, it is a credit to David Hancock and this province and I think it is a credit to the federal government that we are getting the message. You know, at the Justice Summit that was held here in this province, one of the key things they talked about was crime prevention, reorienting the justice system to the front end and identifying the root causes of crime.

That is why you are here and that is why I do what I do in this program and that is why David

Hancock does what he does. Because we know it is not only wasteful of human resources, but it is wasteful of economic resources to spend those billions and billions of dollars after someone has been hurt. Let's think about turning that around and doing a better job at the front end — that is what communities in this province and all over this country are doing.

So I think at the end of all of this, what is important is for all of us to redouble our efforts and focus on what each one of us can do in our local community and that is obviously why you are here. That is obviously why this conference was held and you know, as I mentioned earlier, for too long justice issues, especially criminal justice issues, were left to the authorities, be that the police, the prosecutor, the judge, the correction system, but that has clearly been inadequate, not to mention shortsighted.

We must change the very definition of the justice system and increase its commitment to preventing crime through early prevention and a coordinated community approach. So the real experts on crime prevention are the people who live and work in our communities. They are people like you. The success of the National Strategy is due to Canadians, Albertans like you, who have come forward with fresh ideas and workable solutions.

So on behalf of the Government of Canada, but most particularly myself, as Minister of Justice, I thank you all for being here and devoting these three days to looking at strategies by which we can all make our communities safer and more secure places. You are here to do what I sense is happening all over this country now, not only in the 800 communities in which you find the National Crime Prevention Strategy at work, but all over this country. People like you are coming together to say: wouldn't it make much more sense if we work to prevent crime, prevent hurt, prevent loss, prevent victimization and what is our role, each one of us in our family, in our churches, in our schools, in our businesses? Each one of us has a role to play and your presence here is about acknowledging that responsibility and taking ownership of your part of the solution.

So I thank you for being here. I thank the people who have organized this meeting and I think all of you are a shining example of what we can do when communities and the people who live in them decide to get involved and take ownership of issues like safety and security. Thank you all for being here and good luck with everything you are doing.

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